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## PREPARATION OF COLLEGE TEACHERS OF ENGLISH<sup>1</sup>

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By courses for college teachers of English I mean courses offered in the graduate school primarily or exclusively for those who are preparing to teach English to undergraduates. As a very large percentage of the graduate students in English hope for this opportunity, even though it may come only after years of waiting and apprenticeship, my subject may be said to include broadly all of the courses that are offered to English students in the graduate school. My purpose, however, is to consider only such courses as have a distinctively professional intention, and these are at present comparatively few in number. They may for convenience be classified loosely in two groups: (1) Courses that aim to supply elements that have been omitted in the previous education of the student and that are deemed essential to professional equipment; (2) courses that deal directly with the educational problems involved in the teaching of English and that appeal directly to the student as a prospective teacher. With the complete conquest of the undergraduate field by the elective system and with the unlimited offerings now made to advanced undergraduates, courses of the first class have become increasingly necessary.

It long ago became necessary to prescribe courses in Old and Middle English for most of the English graduate students. The great majority of graduates present themselves without such courses. Some have read even their Chaucer in modernized versions if they have read their Chaucer at all. In their undergraduate years they have followed the line of personal inclination so exclusively as to have shut themselves from contact with whole periods of English literature that the college teacher must know if his judgments and teachings are to be sound.

<sup>1</sup> Presented at the New York meeting of the National Council, November, 1916, before the college section.

You will also find in these days numbers of aspiring graduate students in English who are handicapped by the necessity of "getting up" a modern or an ancient language as an extra. This of itself is not so serious a matter; the serious thing is in what it indicates. It indicates a general loss in the total amount of literary and linguistic study that has been done by those who are hoping to teach English to undergraduates. Thirty years ago a minimum in languages other than English, equivalent to ten years in one language, might be safely assumed. This was usually divided as follows: Latin, four preparatory and two to four college years; Greek, two preparatory and two to four college years; modern languages might be taken in substitution for the ancient but the total minimum in languages was nearly twice what it will average today. The problem is not one that concerns English graduate study alone; it concerns the other modern languages quite as much, and the classics most of all. There has been a serious loss in the total literary and linguistic training of those desiring to major in English in the graduate school.

Doubtless there are compensations for this loss. There is probably a better general acquaintance than formerly among English graduate students with the rudiments of economics, sociology, psychology, history, politics, the history of philosophy, and the natural sciences, and this acquaintance counts as a positive asset when the teaching of composition to young students of varied interests comes to be undertaken. It is obvious that, if the language requirements are to be restored in whole or in part, a readjustment of the undergraduate curriculum will be necessary and perhaps the opportunities of English itself for so large a share in that curriculum will have to be curtailed in favor of other languages and literatures. It may be advisable also to remove to the graduate school many courses that are now offered both to graduates and to advanced undergraduates. The multiplicity of such courses is largely responsible for the fact that the work for the master's degree has become merely a fifth year of college work with no radical alteration of aim and method.

While there are no courses in the graduate school that will not count to the advantage of the college instructor in his work with

Freshmen and Sophomores, very few of these courses have a distinctively professional intention. Not one of them can truthfully be said to be absolutely indispensable for everyone as preparation for Junior college teaching, though each of them is desirable for some form of service that may be required.

If some genius should devise a course of personality, a course in scientific and humanistic curiosity, a course in sympathy with the interests of the young and the ignorant, and should show us how to communicate these things to the young teacher, we should require that course of everybody. These things a person has or has not. I doubt if they can be communicated. Like divine grace they seem to be imparted to the few and denied to the many. It does little good to preach about them, and we must assume them rather than insist upon them for fear of depleting the ranks of the profession. The person who is to teach college Freshmen needs these traits above all other things. They are better than all the arts and devices of pedagogy. Lacking the impulse to teach implied by these gifts, a person's chances for success are small indeed. Waiving these personal gifts, we may consider a few specific courses that are now offered and sometimes required of the prospective teacher.

The person who is called upon to teach Freshman composition will be handicapped in his work as critic of raw student efforts if he has omitted from his graduate curriculum a course in linguistics, especially a course in historical English grammar. Acquaintance with the history of idiom will not only enable him to criticize with enlightenment but also will add greatly to his scientific interest in the work that he is doing. Some of our graduate schools offer courses in the study of English usage. Such courses are a direct preparation for the work of composition-teaching and may properly be called professional.

The graduate schools have always offered at least one course also whose purpose is to acquaint the student with methods of investigation and organization of material. All of us will remember one man in the English department to whom all graduate students were sent at the outset of their graduate work for orientation, for the purpose of learning how to take hold of a small problem, how to ascertain what is known about it, how to detect the next slight step

forward, how to prepare for it, how to cast aside dead work without despair, and how to hold on relentlessly until results finally begin to appear. Merely to learn from such a man how to state truthfully what has been found out is in itself a great accomplishment. It is to be regretted if any such courses have lost their importance. Their value to the prospective teacher lies not in the results but in the process itself. The process itself is fundamental to the sound teaching of undergraduates. Much of it is directly transferable in an elementary way to the classroom where Freshmen are learning to write or where Sophomores are having their introductory work in literature. If every graduate school insisted upon such a pro-seminar in methodology as indispensable, instead of trusting that somehow and somewhere in the multiplicity of graduate courses the student would gain this organizing power, the professional competency of the young instructor would be greatly increased for the very service to undergraduates that is most desired.

Closely related to the professional are also those courses in literary movements and tendencies that require wide reading over extensive periods. The greatest value of these is not in the breadth of information acquired but in the breadth of sympathy created and in the wider basis provided for sound judgment. The philosophical treatment demanded in such courses induces the state of mind in which the college teacher of literature must approach his work, where the ability to cite comparisons, to find likenesses and differences, is indispensable to creating interest and to arriving at just conclusions.

For the same reason the courses in comparative literature may be easily classified as directly contributing to the professional competency of the college teacher. These things, though well known, are very often not fully considered by those who desire to add to the graduate curriculum courses that are more obviously professional in content and purpose, courses that will keep ever before the graduate student the fact that he is preparing to teach. The professional value of graduate work as now given should not be questioned and need not be discounted in considering the problem before us. The influence and example of great teachers, the acquisition of methods of sound judgment and of right habit, the zeal for learning, which the graduate school affords will always be

a great part, if not the best part, of the professional equipment of the student.

Yet there is need of at least one directly professional course for the prospective teacher, and it is highly desirable for those who have had experience in teaching, as well as for those without such experience. I mean a course in which attention is given specifically to the problems of teaching that center in the Freshman composition work and in the first college course in English literature. The problems discussed and investigated in such a course are the very ones that older heads have failed thus far to solve; for example, the specific aims of the elementary courses; the necessity for such courses; the bearings of psychology on current practice; the proper content of such courses; the order of topics; the best basis of differentiating students into groups for instruction; the use of the conference period; co-operative schemes among departments; the grammar question; oral composition; the measurement of results. The work of such a course necessitates a knowledge of current practice in our leading institutions and visitation of such classes as are readily accessible. A little practice teaching also is always possible in large institutions. An acquaintance with the work of the secondary schools is a necessary element of such a course. Such a course is best conducted as a seminar and it is highly important that the reports be discussed by experienced members of the department, especially those who are directing the courses in elementary composition and literature. It will require visitation of these classes at times and incidentally will create a live interest among all members of the department.

It would clarify the whole situation to make the Master's degree in English a teacher's degree, indicating that the holder had made special preparation for teaching English and naming both his scholastic and his professional preparation. If this were done, it would be found that the Master's degree could hardly be won in a single year; for the new matters calling for attention on the professional side, such as oral training and the study of speech sounds, are too numerous and important to admit of hasty treatment. On no account, however, should new subjects be permitted in substitution for the scholarship requirement at present demanded.